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## Learn How to Manage Job Search Stress



by Charles B. Maclean CareerJournal.com

### Introduction

Thirty years ago, I was fired with enthusiasm. Looking back, I know that if I'd stayed in that mismatched job, I'd have lived my life less fully and not grown in ways that serve me now. This is easy for me to say now, but at the time I felt angry, victimized and embarrassed. For a short time, I even contemplated ending it all.

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Job loss can evoke a range of emotions from anger to shame. Those emotions can change quickly and may even resurface periodically. The re-employment process can be seen as a roller coaster with ups and downs. Back then, I didn't know the value of honoring my emotions and, as a result, rode the roller coaster of unemployment much longer and with more whiplash than I would today.

You can reduce the dips and length of your roller-coaster ride. Following is the advice that I've hammered out on the anvil of experience, having been fired myself and coached others in outplacement over the years.

Ninety percent of the job-search process is an "inside" job: managing your emotions. That means being able to control your thoughts and emotions so that they serve you. You may never get over your job loss, but you will get through it.

Remember, you're a normal human being having normal reactions to an abnormal event. You may experience a variety of emotions, including sadness, anger, joy and shame. Emotions are neither good nor bad. They just are.

Learning to go with the flow of your emotional roller coaster is a first step, according to Jesse Reeder, author of "Black Holes and Energy Pirates: How to Recognize and Release Them" (Crossing Press, 2001), who is a friend and colleague of mine. "Flowing with the roller coaster means allowing ourselves to simply experience anger with the same acceptance that we experience joy, recognizing that both are temporary," she says. "Releasing our emotions means experiencing them with curiosity and a learner's mindset, not judging ourselves for having them. Ironic as it may seem, our fears may be our greatest teachers."

To get the full benefit of these teachers, we have to look at and value our emotions in a new way. Consider that your thoughts create your emotions. When you change your thoughts, your emotions change.

One way to quickly change your emotions is through physical activity, especially doing things you enjoy, such as walking, swimming or even just petting your dog.

But as much as you may want to change your emotions, you shouldn't just simply ignore them. Before you start trying to shift them, it's important to notice them. Try tuning into your body to become conscious about what you're feeling. Some stress-related discomforts can include a clenched jaw, upset stomach, back pain and headache. This type of pain is invariably your body talking back to you.

Try to identify your emotions and assign them a label. Giving them a name shifts your awareness of the feeling as being a fuzzy, generalized state to it being one that's clear, specific and that you then can influence. Don't resist your emotions. Honor them. Whatever you're feeling has value and is likely to be helping you at some level.

Look for the value in your emotions. Doing this will help you reframe your situation, and, hopefully, change a negative mood or outlook into a positive one. Try completing the following sentences:

- I value my feelings of sadness because they \_\_\_\_\_. (For example, "help me appreciate the depth of my loss and become more compassionate with myself and others.")
- I value my feelings of anger because they \_\_\_\_\_. (For example, "give me the energy to act in positive ways.")
- I value my feelings of gladness because they \_\_\_\_\_. (For example, "help me appreciate my blessings.")

- I value my feelings of shame because they \_\_\_\_\_. (For example, "remind me to examine my behavior and act in accordance with my values.")

Another way to shift your emotions when you're experiencing negative feelings is to simply decide how long you want to feel that way and set a time limit. For example, you might say: "I'm going to stay angry for another 30 minutes, then take a brisk walk and update my resume."

Psychologists call the internal conversations we hold with ourselves "self-talk." Some self-talk can paralyze us: "You'll never get a job again in this economy"; "Only bad people get fired"; or "You're going to lose your family and home." Some self-talk can move us forward: "I forgive myself and anyone else for my current job situation"; "I can deal with anything"; or "I remain calm because I separate fact from interpretation."

Changing your self-talk from negative messages to positive ones will help you shift your emotions in a constructive direction. Visual images can accompany self-talk. If the TV in your head is broadcasting stressful images, reach for the mental remote and change the channel to a favorite calming memory. Surfing between happy, relaxing channels is just fine.

Fear is a common emotion among job seekers because it often comes from feeling out of control. One way to feel and, in fact, regain control is to make and keep promises to yourself each day. These promises could include such job-search activities as debriefing your last interview, crafting and rehearsing past job-success stories or scheduling information interviews. Setting such goals can be empowering and get you started planning the next steps to take.

Keep a written log of your promises and results. At the end of each day, review what you accomplished. To address any gaps between what you promised and what you did, Lisa Fishman, a Portland, Ore., career counselor and stress-management specialist, recommends that you identify and analyze any barriers, whether emotional or physical, that may have held you back from keeping your promises. Were they realistic? Were the activities measurable? Were they consistent with your values? What old patterns of resistance or avoidance might be at work?

Awareness of these issues is what's important, not blaming or beating yourself up. Develop a mindset that observes but doesn't judge. Use your examination of these not-yet-successes as a growth opportunity.

Participating in a job-search support group also can help you manage your emotions. At each meeting, check in with a brief report of what you're feeling and what you're doing about it. Make promises about your job-search plans and results you intend to produce by the next meeting. Make specific requests for support.

Through your job search, be gentle with yourself. Celebrate your efforts in addition to your results. As I had to remind myself during my own job search: You're employed today -- in the full-time job of creating your next, better job.

Remember that you have emotions. Emotions don't have you. You aren't your emotions. Right now you can choose to feel however you wish. But if negative feelings persist and begin to get in the way of your normal day-to-day activities, talk to your spiritual adviser, counselor or coach.

-- Dr. Maclean is an outplacement coach in Portland, Ore. He's the author of "Fired With Enthusiasm -- The Job Getting Support System," an audiotape, and founder of [PhilanthropyNow](#), an online-giving consultant. You can reach him at [charles.maclean@trillium-hollow.org](mailto:charles.maclean@trillium-hollow.org).

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